

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 972

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USCINCEUR

S E C R E T RABAT 0279

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR MO LY TS

SUBJ: TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER: MOROCCAN VIEWS

1. I CALLED ON FONMIN BENHIMA FOR A TOUR D'HORIZON ON JANUARY 21. FONMIN SAID SITUATION IN TUNISIA WAS STILL SERIOUS AND CREDIBILITY AND RELIABILITY OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA WAS NO IN QUESTION. NOBODY HAD KNOWN ANYTHING ABOUT PLANS FOR UNION; NOBODY HAD BEEN CONSULTED; AND MACHINATIONS OF MASMOUDI WERE NOW VERY MUCH IN THE OPEN. IF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA WERE TEN YOUNGER, ONE COULD BE CONFIDENT THAT HE COULD CONTROL THE SITUATION; BUT AS IT WAS, MASMOUDI REMAINED A DANGER.

2. KING HASSAN HAD CLEARLY FORESEEN THIS SITUATION WHEN HE HAD PREVIOUSLY WARNED BOURGUIBA AGAINST THE MACHINATIONS OF MASMOUDI, BUT BOURGUIBA HAD SAID THIS WAS INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF TUNISIA, AND A COLD SPELL HAD ENSUED. FOREIGN MINISTER THEN RETOLD WELL KNOWN STORY OF CONDOLENCE VISIT OF TUNISIAN MINISTER BELKHOJA AND OF HURRY-UP DEMAND FOR SENDING A NEW MOROCCAN AMBAS-

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SADOR TO TUNISIA WITHOUT TELLING MOROCCO WHAT WAS GOING

TO HAPPEN. MOROCCO FELT CONSIDERABLY PUT OUT AS RESULT AND WAS CURRENTLY WATCHING SITUATION THERE CLOSELY.

3. MINISTER REPEATED THAT MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT FELT MASMOUDI STILL A DANGER. HE WAS SHREWD AND STRONG. ALGERIA AND MOROCCO SAY EYE-TO-EYE ON THIS SITUATION AND WERE HAVING FREQUENT CONSULTATION. THESE BEGAN WITH PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE'S TELEPHONE CALL TO KING HASSAN ONE HOUR AFTER ANNOUNCED FUSION. BOTH COUNTRIES WERE DETERMINED THAT NOTHING SHOULD BE DONE WITHOUT OR AGAINST ALGERIA AND MOROCCO. THE WHOLE MASMOUDI ACTION WAS PART OF A PLAN BY QADHAFI AND WAS DIRECTED EVEN MORE AGAINST ALGERIA THAN AGAINST MOROCCO. IF SECRET AGENTS COULD BE TRAINED AND EQUIPPED IN LIBYA AND THEN SENT ACROSS OTHER FRONTIERS TO CAUSE TROUBLE IN MOROCCO, ALGERIA WAS EVEN MORE VULNERABLE, AS ANTI-ALGERIAN AGENTS WOULD HAVE TO ASSEMBLE ONLY ACROSS THE BORDER IN LIBYA. MASMOUDI'S DEFENSE OF EXTREMIST ARAB MOVEMENTS FITTED WELL INTO HIS ROLE AS AGENT OF QADHAFI.

4. NOW IT WAS TASK OF ALGERIAN AND MOROCCAN GOVERNMENTS TO STRENGTHEN AS FAR AS POSSIBLE POSITION TUNISIAN PRIME MINISTER HEDI NOUIRA, AND THE MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT WAS IN CONSTANT TELEPHONIC AND TELEGRAPHIC CONTACT WITH HIM. THE SITUATION WAS STILL TENSE, AND NOUIRA HAD TAKEN SECURITY PRECAUTIONS IN TUNIS IN ORDER TO ISOLATE THE PRESIDENT, BUT NOBODY COULD BE SURE WHAT QADHAFI AND MASMOUDI STILL HAD UP THEIR SLEEVES, AS THEY MUST HAVE FORESEEN THE PRESENT TURN OF EVENTS. THIS WAS WHY NOURI MUST STILL MAKE SOME GESTURES TOWARD MASMOUDI, BECAUSE HE DID NOT HAVE THE SITUATION COMPLETELY IN HAND.

5. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH DCM, FONMIN'S BROTHER, GHALI BENHIMA, SAID HE STILL EXPECTED GO TO TUNISIA AS AMBASSADOR AND THOUGHT HE WOULD PROBABLY DEPART RABAT ABOUT FEBRUARY 10.
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